1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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121 128 If I were to investigate and report on the Bella Coola at the present time, I would undoubtedly be influenced by many years of contact with American anthropologists and their work. I would assume a greater knowledge of North-West coast institutions, less interest in the details of ceremonial rites, and it would be impossible not to avoid comparisons with, and observations upon, the theoretical implications of many of the facts recorded. But though every field investigator is strictly objective as to the facts he collects, yet his interests, and his method of presenting them, are coloured by his background; in my case, by the older school of English anthropology. On the whole, I think this is fortunate. It means that the Bella Coola are portrayed as I saw them when I came fresh to a new field, practically uninfluenced by problems of North-West coast culture, and fully prepared to throw myself into their life. They were "my people," not a group in which I was interested because they had, or had not, certain culture traits with which I was concerned. In the course of my teaching experience, furthermore, I have wished repeatedly to give serious students detailed field monographs in which are recorded the interwoven social, religious, and folk-lore concepts of a people, the sum-total of their mental life, collected by one man at one time. This I have tried to do for the Bella Coola.

123 [115] Following the English tradition, I wish to record how this material was collected. Before leaving for British Columbia, I was advised by the late H. I. Smith, who had worked in the area, to talk to Joshua Moody (see Plate 1), an elderly Bella Coola Indian with whom Smith had worked. On explaining to Joshua that I had come to record in permanent form the traditions and lore of *his* people, Joshua grinned broadly and promised his help. Unfortunately, he spoke only a few words of English. I tried interpreter after interpreter, Indian and white, with only fair success, and my difficulties increased with the [464] opening of the canning season and the consequent employment of the younger men and women. I was urged to learn the [122] Chinook jargon, which serves widely as a *lingua franca* on the [198]

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coast, and began the study with much misgiving. The results were surprisingly satisfactory.

After a few weeks I found that I had sufficient knowledge of Chinook to dispense with interpreters and deal directly with the older people, a tremendous advantage. Pride of ancestry is one of the strongest characteristics of the Bella Coola, and once convinced of my sincere interest in and respect for their history, they were willing to talk. They resent the condescension with which most white men regard them, so that contact with one who was friendly and sympathetic came as a pleasant surprise. There were, of course, difficulties. The canning season had begun and every able-bodied man was working away from the village. The conviction of each person that he was the best source of information, and that conferences with another were useless or unreliable, caused distrust. The desire of each informant to discuss only what interested him; the complexity of Bella Coola life itself; the necessity of checking every statement, and the extreme difficulty of doing so on account of discrepancies in the myths of different families; the fear, almost groundless, of each individual that someone else had infringed on his rights by recounting some legend; and, not least, the need for tact, patience, and a sense of humour under all conditions, were some of the obstacles to be surmounted. Nor was Chinook entirely satisfactory. It has enough words for matters pertaining to fishing, hunting, and trading, but for the realms of sociology or theology it is inadequate. This difficulty could not have been overcome without the patient help of my informants. Animated by the desire to help, they used every expedient in the way of parallel and synonym to explain obscure terms. Sometimes a younger man was called in for some abstruse meaning; more often it gradually became clear from different applications. Once the significance of a word was definitely understood, I made a note of it and used it henceforth. A useful vocabulary was thus built up, and conversations were carried on in mixed Bella Coola and Chinook, eked out by whatever English words were known by the person with